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DE RUEHBW #0268/01 0581352  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
P 271352Z FEB 07  
FM AMEMBASSY BELGRADE  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0352  
INFO RUEHPS/USOFFICE PRISTINA 3657  
RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC 1304  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 BELGRADE 000268

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E.O. 12958:N/A  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [SR](#) [YI](#)  
SUBJECT: MORE SERBIAN REACTIONS TO ICJ RULING

REF: BELGRADE 260

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SUMMARY  
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¶1. (SBU) Serbia's major parties (DSS, DS, SRS, SPS) all heralded the findings issued yesterday by the International Court of Justice as a generally "not guilty" verdict for Serbia. While welcoming the exoneration for complicity in genocide, both President Tadic and PM Kostunica did acknowledge the ICJ's charge that SCG did not act to prevent the genocide, and both acknowledged Serbia's need to meet its ICTY obligations. END SUMMARY.

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OFFICIAL RESPONSES  
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¶2. (SBU) In his official statement, President Tadic noted that the ruling was "immensely important to Serbia and its citizens for proving that Serbia did not commit genocide in Bosnia? but that ?the part of the ruling pertaining to Serbia?s failure to do what was in its power and prevent the genocide of Bosnian citizens in Srebrenica is hard on Serbia". He highlighted the court's demand that the country act on its ICTY obligations as soon as possible, stating that failure to do so would most likely result in "dramatic political and economic consequences". President Tadic also urged the Serbian parliament to adopt a declaration unequivocally denouncing the crimes committed in Srebrenica saying that "this would pave the way for improving relations between Serbia and BiH, building new trust among the peoples of the two countries and improving political and economic relations".

¶3. (SBU) PM Kostunica stressed that ?the ICJ ruling in Bosnia's lawsuit against FRY is particularly important as it clears Serbia of the accusation of genocide.? He allowed, however, that the only way to achieve reconciliation between the former Yugoslav nations was in the completion of the war crimes trials and bringing their perpetrators to justice. He added that Serbia was ?undertaking and will continue to undertake? all the necessary measures leading to the full cooperation with the ICTY.

¶4. (SBU) The single dissenting political voice

was provided by the center-left LDP coalition. In their statement, the party and its partners expressed their disbelief at the verdict, stating that there is no room for satisfaction, highlighting the ICJ's finding that genocide was committed in Srebrenica. "Serbia is guilty of a failure to prevent it (genocide) and to punish it. This should be taken very seriously and the Serbian Assembly should vote in a resolution on the immediate arrest and extradition of Mladic". Local human rights organizations also decried the ruling as too soft on Serbia. Serbia's most prominent advocate for justice in war crimes cases, Natasa Kandic, judged that Serbia's success in concealing critical evidence from the ICJ resulted in the lighter ruling.

15. (SBU) Belgrade media largely followed the pattern of yesterday's coverage, with the major papers carrying headlines such as "Serbia is not guilty" and "Freed from the accusation of genocide". Some chose to highlight the fact that monetary reparations will not be paid to Bosnia, and many left out the details of the two negative findings on their front pages. Most papers carried the disappointed reactions to the news from Bosnian and Croatian officials.

16. (SBU) Opinion pieces were fairly balanced, although some authors took a slightly more cynical view of the verdict as it pertains to how Serbia is viewed in the world. Pro-government Politika's Editor-in-Chief Ljiljana Smajlovic writes that although expected, the International Court of Justice's ruling that Serbia was not

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responsible for the genocide in Bosnia was received with relief by Serbians, but was not cause for celebration [Note: This despite reports that the Serbian Embassy in The Hague held a party to celebrate the verdict on the evening of February 26. End note.] Smajlovic believes that by this ruling, Serbia officially became linked to the genocide, and pointed out that Serbia's innocence is not complete. She writes that "one who watches a crime and does not do anything to prevent it is not a moral person," and concludes that the decision would most likely be used by Bosnians to destroy the legitimacy of Republika Srpska.

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